

KOPHOBELEMNONIDAE

JEFF GRANT

Hastings, New Zealand

Although not always essential to Scrabblers, one of the main functions of a dictionary is to provide its user with a clear definition of the terms it contains. For example, if we look up MIDDLE-AGED in Chambers we find 'between youth and old age, variously reckoned to suit the reckoner'. Fair enough! The ultimate in concision was reached by Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition, which defined in early printings the word RAFTMAN as 'a raftman'. No argument there.

What about the other side of the coin? Have you ever looked up a word and been assailed by a definition so convoluted that you were none the wiser after reading it? Let's take an extreme case. Suppose you are reading a book on marine life and suddenly came upon the fascinating word KOPHOBELEMNONIDAE. Intrigued, you rush to your Chambers and look it up. Alas, the limitations of this reference are soon apparent - the word is not there. Fortunately you have a collection of larger dictionaries, so you confidently turn to the Shorter Oxford. Still no luck. Somewhat peeved, you decide enough is enough and get out your copy of Webster's Third Edition, a rather large dictionary with a reputation for its fine collection of scientific words. You turn to the right page and scan the column - kootenai, kope, kopeck, koph ... kopi. Unbelievable! Your word isn't here either.

Mystified, but by no means beaten, you refer to the largest English lexicon of them all, the 17-volume Oxford English Dictionary. Surely this august work will include the word. It takes but a minute to confirm that once again you have drawn a blank.

Suddenly an inspiration! What about the 6½-inch-thick Webster's Second Edition, the same one that includes 'raftman'? You struggle to lift the massive tome from its place on the bookshelf and eagerly flip through to K. Your hopes are soon dashed - the word is proving most elusive.

In desperation you decide to check Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary, published in 1924. Tentatively you open Volume 1, and turn to page 1366. You rub your eyes in disbelief - there it is, KOPHOBELEMNONIDAE! Your search is over; at last you will be enlightened. Well, unfortunately in this case it is not so easy. Here is the definition with which we are confronted:

A family of stelechotokean anthozoos, belonging to the alcyonarians, with a rachis longer than peduncle, cylindrical and with parachides provided with retractile autozooids in indefinite rows

Now unless you happen to be a zoophytologist it is likely there will be seven words here which are unfamiliar to you (assuming you know 'cylindrical' and 'retractile'). It is apparent you must do some further research.

Firstly 'stelechotokean': this word has rather a long definition, but basically it means 'belonging to the order of colonial Anthozoa known as Stelechotokea, which includes the sea-fans'.

What about 'anthozoans'? These are members of the class 'Anthozoa', coelenterates like anemones and corals. 'Coelenterates' are creatures whose enteric cavity (gut) occupies the entire interior of their body and functions as a vascular as well as a digestive system.

You now move on to 'alcyonarians', members of the Alcyonaria, 'a subclass or order of actinozoans whose autozooids or individuals have 8 pinnate tentacles and the same number of uncalcified mesenteric folds'. A few more clarifying definitions are in order: 'actinozoans' - members of the Actinozoa, a division of coelenterates embracing the Anthozoa, 'autozooids' - completely developed zooids, which are individuals, especially when without proper mouth or alimentary canal, 'pinnate' - feather-shaped, 'mesenteric' - pertaining to the mesentery, a thin membranous vertical partition dividing off the perivisceral cavity of an actinozoan. In case you didn't know, 'perivisceral' means situated about the viscera, or body-cavity. That finally disposes of 'alcyonarians'.

You now move on to the related terms 'rachis' (plural 'rachides') and 'parachides'. A 'rachis' is an axial skeleton, as of a polyp, and 'parachides' are the sides of the rachis. If you're not sure of 'axial' or 'polyp' you must look them up, too!

The final word to examine from the original definition is 'peduncle' - a stalk, as for the attachment of an organ or organism.

Now at last you should have a clear picture of KOPHOBELEMNON-IDAE!